

3 An Erotics of Violence

Masculinity and (Homo)Sexuality in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*

A symptomatic silence over gender and sexuality haunts analyses of Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film, *A Clockwork Orange*. Criticism of the film has tended to focus on three general areas – philosophical questions and concepts (i.e., free will and humanism), the film's representation of violence, and Kubrick as film auteur. These analyses frequently treat gender and sexuality superficially or ignore them entirely. In order to articulate its visual and thematic concerns, however, the film both supports and parodies the stability of (hetero)sexual difference. Because of this tension in representation, I want to consider the construction of gender and sexuality in the film and specifically explore the film's construction of masculinity.

Before beginning my analysis, I want to summarize briefly the three general areas of criticism mentioned above. First, the film's philosophical arguments on free will situate Alex's violent anarchism against the government and the Ludovico scientists' fascist attempts to control and contain him. Because the only sympathetic character is Alex, the film mobilizes support for anarchism over fascism by portraying the other characters as caricatures. Throughout the film, their hypocrisy undermines their credibility, leaving Alex in a position of relative moral and narrative authority.

This thematic and philosophical irony of the film has been a common area of exploration for several critics.¹ While *Clockwork* explores these issues, however, it also casts a critical gaze on the antihero, Alex. Thomas Allen Nelson, for example, does not characterize Alex's actions and subjectivity as ironic, but rather as straightforward and

refreshingly normal. He writes:

Alex works from the inside out – from fantasy to performance – as he transforms the lifeless settings and cultural mythology of an overly conditioned society into a new order of truth. . . . He does not separate mind from body, reflection from action, the unconscious from social reality; nor does he transfer his sexual or violent urges onto objects and become, like others, a voyeur of his own degradation. (p. 154)

Nelson's disturbing embrace of Alex's "new order of truth" is not necessarily reflected in the film, which treats ironically Alex's unrestrained libido, violence, imprisonment and conditioning, and certainly his "rebirth." Although *Clockwork* clearly mobilizes identification with Alex, it also demands a suspension of belief in the reliability of this "humble narrator."

A second and related type of criticism has also emphasized the film's irony and distanciation by focusing on its representation of violence.² Controversial since its inception, *Clockwork* has provoked a variety of responses ranging from vehement hatred to enthusiastic praise. While violence is a central element in the film, however, few besides Daniels have discussed the ways in which gender and sexuality influence Alex's "ultraviolence." Although Alex attacks both men and women, the kinds of violence he perpetuates are not analogous. Furthermore, any analysis of violence should take masculinity into account. Especially given the historical context of Vietnam, films with traumatized and violent male subjects should not be read as gender-neutral statements on violence; indeed, such films may target and traumatize male subjects with a greater intensity than female ones.

Perhaps as a backlash to the controversy over violence, another critical approach to *Clockwork* has focused on Kubrick's style as a film auteur. Auteur-theoretical analyses often overlap those mentioned earlier and are nuanced in stylistic and cinematographic detail. They draw upon Kubrick's reputation as a director who is highly involved in all stages of film production; indeed, each of Kubrick's films bears a characteristic look, regardless of genre. However, such analyses, in avoiding an uncritical celebration of Alex, do not address how Kubrick's images mobilize specific forms of spectatorial identification.

Given how *Clockwork* systematically establishes gender and sexuality as points of reference, such a critical silence on *why* it mobilizes gendered identities and identifications demands reconsideration. Few critics have outlined that gender is present in the film, and when they have gender has not been presented as a problem to be analyzed and explored.³ If it is present, the film's supposedly more important arenas of philosophical/moral debate and directorial style override it. Gender, however, functions as more than a straightforward backdrop to *Clockwork*. From the opening tracking shot of Alex and his droogs [fellow gang members] at the Korova Milkbar, with "furniture" composed of naked female mannequins in sadomasochistic poses, to the rape sequences and attack on the Cat Lady, to Alex's post-Ludovico humiliation at the breasts of a naked woman onstage, to the film's final image of Alex and a woman frolicking in the mud before a crowd of enthusiastic Victorian spectators, the film's treatment of women is significant and problematic. Ignoring this aspect of the film's style or alluding to gender as unproblematic backdrop to ethics and aesthetics perpetuates the film's unexamined but explicit link between free will or narrative agency and a highly virile and violent masculinity. Masculinity thus becomes the default setting for an exploration of supposedly humanist concerns in a cinematic narrative.

Although critics have not explored the construction of masculinity in *Clockwork*, other Kubrick films – *Spartacus*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *2001*, and, most notably, *Full Metal Jacket* – have been subject to such analyses.⁴ Such criticism has examined male homosocial conflicts and a sense of crisis in the consolidation of a male self. Many such studies employ arguments from Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema." In that essay, Mulvey argues that male anxieties sustained and resolved in narrative cinema deploy the subject of the gaze as male and the object of the gaze, the spectacle to be seen and investigated, as female (p. 19). Mulvey's critics have responded with questions such as: what happens, however, when the male subject becomes the object of an intra- or extradiegetic gaze? Or why does masculinity, if it is secure in its authority, often rely on excessive displays of virility and violence in order to sustain, paradoxically, its aspirations to the normal?⁵ As Cohan and Hark ask in their response to Mulvey's essay, "[W]hat are we to make of a masculinity that can preserve its hegemony only by confessing its anxieties at every turn?" (p. 2).

Clockwork takes pains to put Alex, and by extension, masculinity, through an extensive series of trials and challenges, which may or may not be “cured” by the end. Simply celebrating Alex as antihero avoids looking at the film’s anxieties surrounding the stability of masculinity, a stability that can only be sustained by reference to sexual difference. Sexual difference is repeatedly undermined, however, by eroticizing the homosocial field at the expense of the heterosocial (as heterosexual).⁶ Heterosexual encounters like the rapes, the record store *ménage à trois*, and the mud wrestling finale are portrayed as less erotically cathected than, for example, the fight between Alex and his droogs and Billy Boy’s gang, or Alex’s post-Ludovico beatings.

The film’s representation of heterosexuality suggests that heterosexual rape, violence, and even consensual sex are really diversions or, more radically, a prelude to or substitute for more meaningful (and homophobically inflected) sadomasochistic encounters between men. My reading of this structure of desire draws on Eve Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. In her reading of various canonical English literary texts, homosocial desire is triangulated through the trope of two men attracted to the same woman. The men’s rivalry generates a strong undercurrent of eroticism that only can be deflected through reference to the woman.

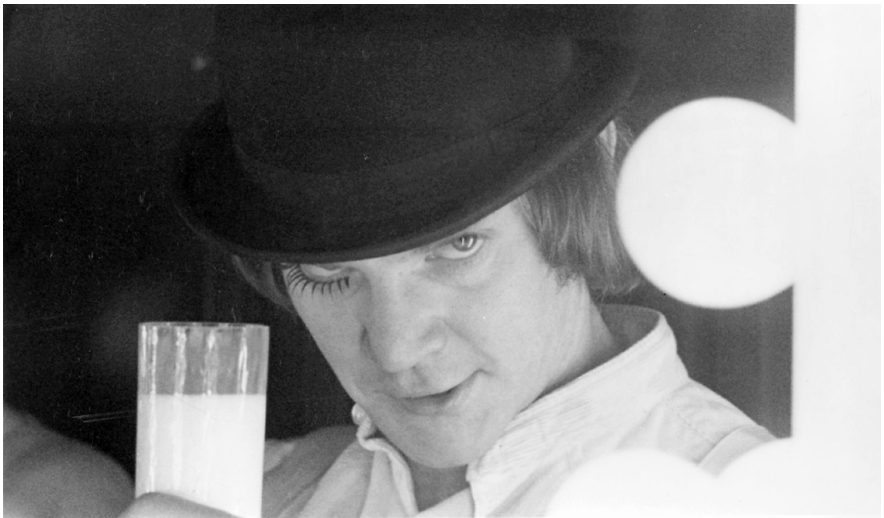
Clockwork employs similar strategies, but often, and more radically, completely eliminates the intermediary woman. In the film, homosocial relations are initially meetings among equals and/or rivals. Precisely because of this starting point, however, the playing field must be rendered unequal through violence. Given the greater eroticism and vitality with which violent contact is represented, however, sexual desire between men is the taboo the film disavows and reiterates in complex and ambivalent ways. Thus, the film maintains an ambivalent relation to women, sustaining their presence as objects of desire while debasing and denying them all subjectivity. Rather than dismiss *Clockwork* for its misogyny, however, I want to examine how misogyny is an effect of anxieties about masculinity. Furthermore, because these anxieties often are represented in highly self-reflexive conditions, the film evidences anxieties over specifically *cinematic* narrative constructions of the male subject.

Clockwork explores the link between masculinity, subjectivity, and violence by symptomatically representing these realms in highly

(homo)eroticized, self-reflexive ways. In my analysis, I look at these tensions both before and after Alex's arrest and imprisonment. In the first section, I examine the opening tracking shot and how homosocial violence is represented within or against heterosexual violence in three of the gang's attacks. In the second section I look at the Ludovico "treatment" and its relationship to self-reflexivity. I also discuss the second HOME sequence and the film's conclusion. In spite of the sharp narrative break that marks the film's second half, *Clockwork* undermines as much as affirms masculinity's narrative authority. Ultimately the film deconstructs the link between vision and narrative mastery by repeatedly positioning Alex among other men as the feminized spectacle. While many critics have celebrated Alex's subjectivity and authority, few have highlighted that his position, tenuous from beginning to end, is treated with more irony and ambivalence than unqualified support.

"READY FOR LOVE ?": MASCULINITY'S HORRORSHOW

The opening tracking shot of *A Clockwork Orange* has often been discussed as a symbol of Alex's narrative mastery. Through the use of the voice-over, a standard cinematic technique for suturing spectatorial identification, Alex captivates us [Fig. 10]. He appears to be the



10. Alex's penetrating gaze.



11. Alex among his drugged droogs.

only character in this extended shot with the ability to look, for the rest of the characters are dulled by their consumption of “moloko-plus,” a drugged version of milk. Alex’s adversarial and sardonic gaze directly meets the camera. As the camera tracks back, Alex is shown situated with his three other droogs in a dark room [Fig. 11]. They rest on white “furniture” – naked female mannequins in sadomasochistic poses with near-orgasmic expressions, their long hair bright blue and red. Other people sit or stand in the room, but their drug-induced stillness make the furniture-women, in their state of sexual abandon, look more alive than their “real” human counterparts. Alex’s voice-over, however, separates him from the others and situates him as the primary, active subject of the narrative.

Several aspects of this shot complicate Alex’s prototypically masculine authority. In spite of his direct gaze and voiceover, he is also the object of the camera’s gaze. In Mulvey’s formulation of the look in narrative cinema, the camera’s gaze allies the diegetic male character’s look with that of the (implicitly male) spectator (pp. 25–26). In this opening shot, however, the film introduces a split between the gaze of the camera and the gaze of its antihero, Alex. Although Alex returns the camera’s gaze, this first shot introduces

a tension between the two looks, a point of disjunction that the film will repeatedly disavow in an effort to sustain Alex's narrative authority.

Furthermore, the opening close-up of Alex shows one eye adorned with false eyelashes and the other without. Through this mark of the feminine *on* the male body – men generally do not wear false eyelashes unless they are drag queens – the film signals an ironic link between masquerade and masculinity. This emphasis on the eye is linked to the bloodied eyeball “cufflinks” on Alex and his droogs’ sleeves and foregrounds the self-reflexive dimension of the film, but not in a gender-neutral way.

I raise this point not in order to refute readings of the self-reflexive dimension of the film, but rather to point out the complicated interplay between the film's treatment of gender and its emphasis on self-reflexivity. Alex does achieve narrative authority in this opening scene, but only against a series of visual contradictions. The “women” of the Korova Milkbar ostensibly contrast Alex's masculine vitality and narrative authority. Alex's feminized eye, however, metonymically links him to the female furniture. Furthermore, the white shirts and pants both he and his droogs wear as part of their costume parallel and blend in with the porcelain white female furniture-figures upon which they sit.⁷ Alex's classically masculine posture and narrative authority can only be achieved by placing him in a room full of lifeless “women” and frozen, silent men. Although the voice-over suggests narrative authority, Alex remains the object of the camera's gaze throughout the shot, physically diminishing in size through the backward tracking motion until the camera literally disembodies him. Thus, these tensions represents Alex's implicit polymorphous perversity. The opening shot not only establishes dual anxieties over what constitutes the human and sexual difference, but “connects more specific thematic and visual concerns such as the relationship between power and gender differences, sadomasochism (itself the ultimate link between violence, power, and eroticism), and cinematic self-reflexivity.

I have focused on the conflation and contradiction of themes in the opening shot because the film explores and develops these themes throughout the diegesis. This tension in the first shot between Alex as masterful masculine subject and feminized object of the gaze parallels

the tension between the film's highly erotic homosocial realm and its distanced, comical, and/or incidental representation of heterosexuality. The simultaneous disavowal and privileging of a homoerotic, violent masculinity over against a superficial treatment of heterosexual sex/rape can be witnessed in three of the film's first sequences of attack – Billy Boy's near-gang rape of a young woman, Alex and his droogs' attack of Mr. Alexander and his wife, and Alex's attack and murder of the Cat Lady. In each sequence, a predominantly heterosexual encounter becomes incidental to a more serious and meaningful act of homoerotically cathected male violence. In these sequences and throughout the film, the display of phallic noses, dildos and large not-so-delicately-concealed codpieces are present less for the purpose of intimidating women than paradoxically for both intimidating and reassuring men. As if playing on male anxieties about penis size, *Clockwork* announces its own anxieties through its aggressive and insistent portrayal of the penis-as-phallus in a variety of guises and uses (Note that Alex's full name is "Alexander de Large"). *Clockwork* dispenses with the possibility of representing male homoeroticism – and the male subject – outside of violence. Thus, violence as the condition of masculine subjectivity paradoxically destroys and enables both subject and object of desire in one broad representational stroke.

The first of these sequences takes place at the Derelict Casino. The first shot is a close-up of a painted sun from which the camera pans down to a long shot of a gang of men raping a young woman on the casino's stage. She unsuccessfully struggles with them, her cries intermingled with the strains of Rossini's overture to "The Thieving Magpie." Because of the setting, the shot, and the music, the rape scene loses a great deal of its horror and instead becomes a comic spectacle. Alex's voice-over reinforces this distancing by referring to the rape as a "game of the old in-out," with the female victim merely a "weepy young devotchka [girl]." Just as Billy Boy's gang has fully undressed the woman and thrown her on a (conveniently placed) mattress, there is a cut to Alex and his gang at the periphery of the large room. Alex calls out to Billy Boy, insulting him and challenging him to a fight, a challenge that Billy Boy and his gang accept with pleasure. The men fight and Alex's gang successfully beats the rivals.

The filming of the woman's rape as a comedy and its deferral to the exuberant fight between men supports the homoerotic tenor

of this sequence. When Alex challenges Billy Boy, the camera follows the woman as she runs offstage and escapes. Prior to this shot, the voice-over and shot-reverse-shot pattern between Alex and Billy Boy's gangs link Alex to the extradiegetic spectator, with the struggling woman as the primary object of both gangs' look. Insofar as the camera follows the woman's escape in this sequence, however, the woman-as-spectacle disappears, leaving only men in her place. Furthermore, the music that accompanies this sequence is an overture, an ironic suggestion that the woman's rape functions as a preamble to the more serious and worthy struggle between men.

Mario Falsetto writes of this sequence:

The violent, choreographed rumble takes place in a pitlike, ground-levelspace that evokes images of Roman gladiators, contemporary wrestling and other acrobatic movement or sport. . . . The exaggerated, fragmented actions are not only theatrical, but also invoke the idea of fantasy. The sequence has the heightened intensity one might associate with the drug-induced reveries of a teenager raised on movies and comic books.

(p. 60)

This "teenager" is not ungendered; while Falsetto situates this "fantasy" in a particular way, he does so by way of references to icons of male homosexual camp, especially "Roman gladiators." In this scene, Kubrick does not distance the spectator from the violence but rather invests the violence with vitality and spirit. When Alex challenges Billy Boy, he taunts "Come and get one in the yarbles [balls] – If you *have* any yarbles." Billy Boy responds "Let's get her, boys." This feminine reference to Alex and his gang signals the homoerotic overtones of the subsequent fight. Although the attempted rape is farcical, the fight scene is represented as comparatively more sexual and phallic, the strains of Rossini swelling in loudness as the fight intensifies. The fight montage concludes when Alex and each member of his gang pair off with Billy Boy and his men. In a long shot, Billy Boy and gang lie in a row on the ground, writhing in pain, while Alex and each of his men beat them with the canes they held at the beginning of the fight. In a close-up of Alex repeatedly beating one of them, the angle of the shot, Alex's cries, and the obvious pleasure he takes from the event imply that the blows could be read as a form of penetration.

Although the second attack is on a heterosexual couple, the homoerotic overtones are no less striking. In the second attack, Alex orchestrates and performs the violence against the writer, Mr. Alexander, and his (significantly) unnamed wife. Upon gaining entrance to their "HOME," Alex beats Mr. Alexander, destroys his bookshelves and written work, and methodically prepares to rape Mr. Alexander's wife – all while singing Gene Kelly's signature, "Singin' in the Rain." Several congruences between the previous brawl and this apparently more calculated and sadistic attack inform this sequence. Alex's staging of Mrs. Alexander's rape parallels Billy Boy's attempted gang rape, which occurs on a literal stage. In this rape, however, Alex moves from the position of spectator to solo performer. He forces Mr. Alexander into the spectatorial position, a shift illustrated through several close-ups of the tormented Mr. Alexander. Just prior to the sequence's conclusion, Alex sneers at Mr. Alexander, saying, "Viddy [look] well, little brother, viddy well." As in the previous attempted rape, the woman and her experience are not considered important. Alex forces Mr. Alexander to witness – and indeed, *experience* – the rape-as-violation and emasculating appropriation.

Clearly, Oedipal overtones structure this rape scene – a reverse restaging of the primal scene, in which the father is forced to watch the son rape the wife/mother (Nelson, p. 154). Other parallels structure a relation between the two men in addition to the similarity in names. The three shots of a bound and gagged Mr. Alexander, suffering over the spectacle of his wife's rape (which we as spectators do *not* see) foreshadow Alex strapped and bound to the chair during his Ludovico treatments or even Alex trapped by Mr. Alexander and forced to listen to the nausea-inducing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The actor who plays Mr. Alexander, Patrick Magee, adds an extradiegetic reference to this and the later HOME sequence as well: Magee played Sade in Peter Brook's 1967 film, *Marat/Sade* (Falsetto, p. 156). Ironically, Magee as Mr. Alexander now occupies a masochistic role. This reversal and the homoerotic tenor of the sequence suggest that *Clockwork* relies on sadomasochism in order to represent and disavow male homoeroticism. This particular sadomasochistic scene relies on Mrs. Alexander as the site upon which the violence may take place and gain significance *for the two men* – albeit not for the spectator since the sequence ends just as the rape is about to begin.

The last attempted rape/attack sequence arguably has the most overt sexual content of the three. Here, Alex fights with the Cat Lady in her home and murders her with a penis-shaped art object. She has many works of art depicting sadomasochistic and lesbian sex; perhaps this is the female subject's decorative equivalent of the Korova Milkbar furnishings. Rather than focus on this specific sequence, I want to look at the two events that frame the Cat Lady's murder. This murder (signified by a cartoonish image of a vagina dentata) serves as both prelude to and an outcome of homosocial violence. Through slow motion filming, homosocial violence is invested with more emotion and eroticism than Alex's mock display of physical prowess at the Cat Lady's farm.

Prior to the murder, the gang comes to Alex's flat to complain of his dictatorial style. The sequence takes place in the lobby, which has a large, elaborate wall mural depicting Christ against an extensive biblical tableau. The mural includes only one female figure among a sea of male ones, and the tableau is highly homoerotic; notably, sexual graffiti defaces the mural and all the male figures are muscular and scantily clad. Apart from sexually graphic phrases, the graffiti includes penises and arrows drawn to suggest male homosexual and sodomitical sex scenes. Perhaps most provocatively, Christ, the centerpiece of the mural, has been redrawn with an erection. Set against this backdrop, the showdown clearly acquires a homosexual subtext.

In this sequence, Dim is shot in low angle against the mural as he taunts Alex. Georgie stands behind Dim and leans against the chair, occasionally rocking it: his position alludes to sodomy because of the backdrop, the graffiti, and Georgie's visibly large codpiece. Alex explains that he did not go to the Korova because he "had a pain in the gulliver [head]." Dim responds sarcastically: "Sorry about the pain. Using the gulliver too much, then, eh? Giving orders and discipline, perhaps. Are you sure the pain is gone? Are you sure you wouldn't be happier in bed?" Dim's speech links several discourses operating in the film. Just prior to this scene, Alex picks up two women and has sex with them in his room, another comical heterosexual sex scene, shot in fast motion to the *William Tell* Overture and another reference to heterosexual sex as an overture or diversion. Because of this preceding scene, Dim's reference to "using the gulliver too much" conflates the head with the penis. In his subsequent clause,



12. Alex straddles Dim in his chair.

however, Dim's reference to "orders and discipline" links Alex's sexual acts to his harsh disciplinary control over the gang. As the leader, Alex gets the most out of the gang's exploits, both sexually and financially. Georgie and Dim argue for more of the "big, big, big money" that they feel Alex is hoarding, telling Alex that he "thinks like a little child" and that they want "a man's size" portion. This conflation of discourses surrounding sex, discipline, and money metonymically links the head and penis to the phallus.

Apart from the language, the sexual overtones of this homosocial rivalry are also represented visually. Alex agrees to the gang's demands while straddling Dim in his chair, occasionally patting and touching his shoulders and face [Fig. 12]. Medium-long shots against the mural are interspersed with close-ups of Georgie, Dim, and Alex, creating a stifling, rivalrous intimacy. The gang's coercion of Alex can be read as a seduction, in which sex, discipline, and money are equated. By the end of the scene, one wonders just what "pretty polly" really is and whether it may not be about women at all.

Alex retaliates against this "seduction" at the Flatblock Marina in an extended sequence of slow-motion violence against Dim and Georgie. Through a voice-over, Alex condemns Georgie and Dim

bitterly, concluding that “thinking is for the gloopy [stupid] ones, and the omni [smart] ones use inspiration and what Bog [God] sends.” Then, Alex hits them with his pole and kicks them in the crotch, knocking them into the water. As he bends down to assist Dim out of the water, he gashes Dim’s hand with a hidden knife. Although this sequence is shot in slow motion, the vitality and music echo the homoerotic struggle with Billy Boy’s gang. The rampant castration imagery is represented with an almost religious meaningfulness: Alex specifically attacks the men’s penises, slowly slices Dim’s hand, and rivulets of faux blood stream down Dim’s suspenders.

Although this violence temporarily reinstalls Alex as leader of the gang and they proceed to follow Georgie’s plan for attacking the Cat Lady, Alex’s revenge proves to be his undoing. The post-murder scene marks one of the few moments in the film that does not present violence from Alex’s point of view. As Alex exits the Cat Lady’s farm, there is a cut to a close-up of a milk bottle, then a fast track back that reveals Dim holding it behind his back. Alex comes face to face with Dim, and the two men are centered in the frame. There is a cut to a profile two shot of them and much as Alex surprised Dim with the knife, Dim now gashes Alex in slow motion. The impact of the bottle breaking sprays milk on Alex in slow motion, his long phallic nose drooping at his chest. As Alex falls to the ground writhing in pain and crying, his droogs laugh at him and run away.

Alex’s comeuppance threatens an incestuous deformation of the homosocial order. The film exposes the paradox of this social order by revealing that the homosocial relies upon and is undone by its erotic, violent structure. This realm ultimately pays little attention to arbitrary boundaries and divisions, such as different gangs. This final set of sequences is in some ways the film’s most disturbing because it dispenses with the other – women, older men, intellectuals, or the rival gang – and situates the violence within the space that was supposedly safe.

“THE PRISONERS ENJOY THEIR SO-CALLED PUNISHMENT”: LUDOVICO TREATMENT AND A RETURN “HOME”

In the second half of *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex is isolated, punished, and physically and psychologically tortured during and after the

Ludovico treatment. The trials Alex experiences in the second half continue the agonistic male homoeroticism deflected only by the film's distanciation and irony. The primary difference between the first and second parts of the film is Alex's overt failure at mastery in the latter, a failure that situates Alex – and, by extension, spectators – in a masochistic position.

I now want to turn to two sets of encounters in the second half of the film – the Ludovico treatment and the second HOME sequence – in order to explore the agonistic and anxious construction of masculinity within a homosocial realm. I will conclude with an analysis of the ending that challenges the celebratory resolution of *Clockwork's* anxieties and conflicts over masculinity. Its ending must be read retroactively against the preceding enunciation and disavowal of a homoerotic masculinity, one that masquerades (in both the film and many critical analyses) as “humanity.”

The minister who chooses Alex for the Ludovico treatment states that Alex is “enterprising, aggressive, outgoing, young, bold, and vicious” and, therefore, “perfect” for the program. Synonyms not only for the film's constructions of masculinity, these characteristics also reflect the broader cinematic constructions of masculinity as a psychic space that shapes the world. While “vicious” may not seem to constitute an ideal characteristic for a *cinematic* male subject, one need only look at some of the most popular Hollywood genres – westerns, gangster/action films, film noir, war films – to see how often a vicious masculinity is rewarded for its propensity toward aggression and violence. *Clockwork* demonstrates the arbitrary hypocrisy of assigning moral value to certain representations of violence. Alex has all the characteristics of a hero but also an arbitrarily defined morality and mercenary sense of self-interest. Consequently, this emphasis forces spectators to focus on the thrill (and trauma) of violence as the source of the self. In order to sustain this edification of Alex's *male* self, however, the film continually must repeat and reexperience the representation of homosocial violence in a variety of sites and forms, and this repetition exacerbates more than alleviates concerns over masculinity's stability.

Thus, that the film should employ the cinematic realm as the site for Alex's “treatment” is no coincidence: its link between masculine subjectivity and an erotics of violence occurs consistently in

theatrical performative spaces. The Ludovico treatment sequences, however, do more than link spectatorship, passivity, and a desire to be victimized through one's identifications with on-screen subjects: they also deconstruct the safe distinctions between audience and image. In both scenes of Alex's strait-jacketed spectatorship, a series of people remain visible in the long, deep-focus shot of the theater. Alex sits in the front of the theater, the ostensible audience for the film, but he is also the object of the doctors' gaze. Furthermore, the physical effects of the films on Alex mirror the objectification of Alex-as-spectacle. Although Alex remains the subject of the narrative through his point of view shots and voice overs, shots of the ill and horrified Alex, begging for the images and nausea to stop, are interspersed throughout. This shot-reverse-shot pattern, in combination with the double assault on Alex from the doctors and the film's "gaze," place the extradiegetic spectator in a painfully split position of identification.

In each of the two screenings-as-treatment sequences, both Dr. Brodsky and Dr. Brannon ignore Alex's demands and instead politely issue their own: "You must take your chance, boy. The choice has been all yours. You really must leave it to us, but be cheerful about it." That these three sentiments contradict each other is obvious. That they also illustrate the contradictions and illusions simultaneously promoted and disavowed by cinema may be less so. Cinema encourages the illusion of participation ("You must take your chance"), agency ("The choice has been all yours"), and yet, paradoxically, absolute immobility and passivity ("You really must leave it to us"). Thus, this set of contradictions perfectly mirrors the paradox of spectatorial identification. Alex is at once both subject and object of the gaze, both active and passive psychic subject, much like the extra-diegetic spectator who experiences the cinematic narrative itself.

Just as the film constructs a split identification with Alex, so does it *gender* processes of cinematic identification – especially when Alex performs his new and "cured" identity for an assembled crowd of political, prison, and medical officials. This sequence deconstructs the binary opposition between audience and image with even greater force, partly because the intradiegetic filmic image has been replaced with Alex, a real human being. Again, Alex occupies the space of both subject of the narrative and object of the gaze. The ambiguity



13. A “reformed” Alex licks the shoe of his tormentor.

of his role is evident from the first shot of the sequence – a long, wide-angle, deep focus shot of the theater from the side, with the center of the frame dividing the spectators from the stage. Alex is led into this space and becomes the sole figure on stage, standing silently and somewhat awkwardly until there is a cut to the Minister, who narrates the action.

Alex performs these diegetic scenes somewhat unintentionally. The man and woman who perform with him, however, are clearly aware of their roles as actors in the drama, as evidenced by the pleasure with which they perform and respond to the audience’s applause. In this sequence, several shots of Alex on stage are intercut with the prison guard observing him. The guard’s differing reactions to Alex’s performance both parallel and oppose extradiegetic spectatorial responses. He both takes pleasure in watching Alex lick the man’s boot [Fig. 13] and is by turns horrified and astonished by Alex’s passivity and nausea in front of the immobile, seminaked woman. The theatricality of the scenes, as well as the split between Alex as object of the diegetic audience’s gaze and subject of the voice-over, both reinforce and undermine the film’s distancing effects.

The Ludovico sequences also highlight the misogynistic ambivalence toward women. First, while Dr. Brodsky, a man, is in charge of

Alex's treatment, the only doctor shown directly caring for Alex is Dr. Brannon, a stern woman. In one scene, Dr. Brannon enigmatically and menacingly explains to Alex that he feels sick during the films because he is getting better. At this point there is a cut from a low angle close-up of her to the second set of film screenings, the first shot of which foregrounds Hitler and his troops. Although she does not ultimately control Alex's treatment as fully as Brodsky does, the matched cut suggests she does by linking her to Hitler.

Another instance of ambivalence toward women occurs when Alex first experiences nausea during the films. This reaction occurs when the film shows several male gang members raping a woman. The image of gang rape itself, ironically, is not represented as tragic; Alex's horror in being horrified by it is. These rape scene images parallel Billy Boy and his gang's earlier attempted rape, a no-less theatrical affair; thus the Ludovico images act out the deferred rape of the film's opening, reinstalling a heterosexual erotics of violence. On closer inspection, however, this representation of a heterosexual erotics of violence does not stabilize so much as amplify the (homo)sexual anxieties circulating in the text. While these images supposedly represent pleasure for a heterosexual-identified male spectator – they offer unencumbered sexual and visual access to the woman's body – they are highly unpleasurable to Alex.

Perhaps the horror that Alex experiences, while undeniably drug-induced, may stem from the film's equation between seeing and being a victim. While *Clockwork* does not flinch at showing violence to women, such violence becomes horrible only when a kinship is set up between the male subject and the female rape victim as object. Such a kinship recurs throughout the film between Alex and raped women. Apart from this scene, there is visual and aural symmetry between Alex crying in pain at the Cat Lady's door and the "weepy young devotchka" at the Derelict Casino, both scenes set to the same music. More strikingly, perhaps, this kinship recurs in the second HOME sequence, in which Mr. Alexander refers to his now-deceased wife and Alex as "victims of the modern age." Although the staged encounter with the seminaked woman in the theater is not a rape scene per se, the horror of the image lies precisely in the feminization of Alex or, conversely, the triumph of the naked (and therefore presumably powerless) woman over the impotent, passive, clothed Alex. The

priest's outburst on Alex's lost moral "choice" enunciates this anxiety clearly. Earlier the priest had taken Alex aside, thinking Alex was suffering from the urges of "normal" men "deprived of the company of women" while incarcerated. As they discussed Alex's submission to the Ludovico treatment, the priest had said that "when a man cannot choose, he ceases to be a man." One wonders then, whether in the cessation of the choice to rape, Alex "becomes" a woman.

The Ludovico treatment demonstrates a link between cinematic spectatorship and violence, exposing a highly gendered process of identification. Male subjectivity, vision, and experience serve as the implicit setting for the exploration of cinematic self-reflexivity. The more *Clockwork* pursues a stable division between men and women, however, the more clearly it eroticizes the homosocial. The homosocial realm, eroticized through violence, replicates a pseudo-heterosexual division from within. Anxieties over what it means to be a man in the landscape of *Clockwork* result in Alex repeatedly being tested, tortured, beaten, and reformed. Such recurring attempts to sustain an oppositional and therefore well-defined masculinity, however, ultimately destabilize the binary opposition of (hetero)sexual difference itself. In this sense, the film's deconstruction of the distance between audience and image parallels its ambivalent treatment of sexual difference.

Several of these themes I have discussed converge in the second HOME sequence. Visually similar to the first HOME sequence, the second opens with a nearly identical medium close-up of Mr. Alexander (now wheelchair-bound) typing on his electric typewriter when the doorbell rings. As the camera pans to the spot where Mrs. Alexander had sat in the first sequence, a muscular man, Julian, is shown lifting barbells instead. Julian answers the door as she did, but carries a collapsed Alex into the dining room to Mr. Alexander, an act that both echoes and inverts the first HOME sequence [Fig. 14]. Mr. Alexander does not remember Alex until he hears Alex singing "Singin' in the Rain," his horror amplified in a distorted low angle, wide angle-lens shot.

Mr. Alexander proceeds to drug and torment Alex: after the drug-laced wine takes effect, Alex unceremoniously passes out face down in his dinner. Alex awakens and is filled with nausea because of the Beethoven he hears emanating from another room. There is a cut to



14. Julian (David Prowse) carries the helpless Alex into the dining room.

a close-up of Mr. Alexander, smiling malevolently as the music plays. The camera tracks back from Mr. Alexander to reveal two conspirators and Julian impassively waiting for Alex to jump from the window above them. Eventually Alex does attempt suicide and the fall and imagined point of impact are shot mostly from Alex's point of view.

Throughout this extended sequence, Mr. Alexander recovers authority displaced by the first HOME sequence; Mr. Alexander (or Patrick Magee as Sade?) now takes pleasure in causing Alex's torment. Alex had no explicit reason for his attack, and although Mr. Alexander's revenge provokes pleasure, the inversion of roles suggests a sadomasochistic desire structuring the assault. Furthermore, in the second HOME sequence, the woman is no longer necessary for signifying desire between men. A homoerotic (and possibly homosexual) relation between Julian and Mr. Alexander replaces the heterosexual marriage. Mrs. Alexander, who "used to do everything" for Mr. Alexander, is ultimately less adequate than Julian, given Julian's comparatively greater physical strength. Her *absence* signifies Mr. Alexander's desire for Alex – to be punished with murder – but even her presence in the first sequence suggested an absence of subjectivity. In other words, she was there primarily to signify Mr. Alexander's

"rape" in the first sequence, not her own. Her appearance in the red, eye-shaped chair of the first sequence suggests she is not terribly distinct from the Korova "women" – decorative objects against which men measure and become themselves.

The intimacy of the dining room, the same room where the rape took place, and the dinner with wine also evoke an ironic seduction scene. Mr. Alexander heightens this ironic eroticism by insisting Alex have more wine and by moving closer to Alex throughout the dinner. Mr. Alexander compares his wife to Alex and ironically concludes that they are similar. Mr. Alexander, however, is now the menace to Alex, his strained cries for Alex to drink more wine akin to Alex's earlier commands to "viddy well." The first HOME sequence involved invasion of privacy and violent abuse; this sequence reciprocates and parallels that invasion, albeit more discreetly, by contaminating Alex's body with drugs and forcing him to confess his weakness for Beethoven's Ninth and his suicidal tendencies. Alex's body is ultimately attacked by Mr. Alexander just as Alex had attacked Mrs. Alexander's.

Last, Mr. Alexander's tracking shot, in which he sadistically enjoys Alex's torture against a highly stylized tableau of people merging into the decor, parallels Alex's opening tracking shot. Each tracking shot represents the solitary, erotic pleasure of ultraviolence committed for and against men. Throughout this sequence, Mr. Alexander and Alex emerge as inverse images of each other, an inversion underscored by the now-absent figure of the woman (Strick, p. 46). Mr. Alexander and Alex, however, are more than simply father and son, for they are locked in a sadomasochistic exchange. Each HOME sequence offers a site at which one man draws pleasure not from the woman, but rather from the provocation, display, and refusal to assuage male suffering.

If Alex is unwillingly seduced by Mr. Alexander, a seduction that results in a literal and metaphorical fall, then the film's conclusion can be read in similar ways. The conclusion is not necessarily the unmitigated return of Alex's free will, as represented by the will to choose and commit violence. I would suggest that the end – the "cure" – must be read as an ironic and tenuous extension of masculinity as an agonistic, anxious space. Alex's "cure" cements his entrenchment in the state with more disciplinary and bodily control than when he was trapped in prison or strapped in the spectatorial position during

the Ludovico treatments. Although the Minister obsequiously seeks Alex's support for political ends and offers Alex material rewards, this support is tenuous. The government can provide Alex "protection" only when in political favor; moreover, given the ease with which "public opinion can be swayed," one wonders how secure Alex's position of material and psychological comfort ultimately may be.

Alex and the Minister's "arrangement" also represents Alex's entrapment in the role of the spectacle (quite literally, given his body cast). His identity will now be constructed through someone else's lens – both literally, given the multiple photographers facing the camera, and metaphorically, by his hypocritical but highly powerful new father figure. The exuberant conclusion of Beethoven, roses, photographers, and Alex's wrestling fantasy may seem the film's ultimate celebration of Alex, but even this fanfare must be read ironically. The narrative recuperates Alex's mastery through recourse to an elaborate fantasy scenario, but how masterful can this recuperation be when the final image must revert to such a surreal, subjective space? Amid the din of the press and the image of the Minister tightly holding his "new friend," Alex is as psychically restrained in the role of spectacle as he is physically restrained in the space of his own body. The final fantasy deflects from the impending force of the state and its disciplinary regimes, but eventually this force will encroach on the space of Alex's own body and desires – unless he knows how to perform.

CONCLUSION

Thomas Elsaesser, in a reading of "Singin' in the Rain" in the first HOME sequence, goes beyond the obvious self-reflexive and Oedipal emphases of the scene and alludes to some of the paradoxes and pleasures I have outlined in my reading:

[This] scene delves deeply into the nature of cinematic participation and the latent aggression which it can mobilize with impunity: what happens is that before one's eyes an act of brutal violence and sadism is fitted over and made to 'rhyme' with a musical number connoting a fancy-free assertion of erotic longing and vitalist *joie de vivre*. Kubrick is able to exploit the undefined, polyvalent nature of the emotion which the moving image generates, by running, as it

were, two parallel cinematic contexts along the same track, or rather short-circuiting two lines, both charged with emotional energy.
(p. 181)

The image of two parallel tracks running in opposite directions to produce a third, unexpected effect captures not only the representation of violence in *A Clockwork Orange* but also how gender and sexuality circulate in the film as well. Although Elsaesser does not extrapolate on the specificities of how gender and sexuality may relate to this construction, I see Alex and Mr. Alexander – as spectator and performer, father and son, rival and “spouse” – engaging an elaborate series of dualisms beautifully enacted in and through the reference to “Singin’ in the Rain.” As Gene Kelly was “ready for love,” “love,” in Kubrick’s cinematic landscape, has become not simply heterosexual rape and violence, but, more radically, a sadomasochistic struggle between men. Alex’s voice-overs frequently begin with the address “My brothers,” an address that extends the narrative’s implicit homoeroticism into a conspiratorial incestuousness that engenders the spectator. This homosocial landscape renders women incidental as subjects, prized only insofar as they signify masculinity’s otherness.

Clockwork figures this homosocial realm as an erotic landscape, but this eroticism is as strongly disavowed as it is blatantly represented. While all eroticism is marked by violence in *Clockwork*, male homoeroticism is especially marked, resulting in a homophobic identification of male homoeroticism with sadomasochism. Homosociality, unlike the heterosocial and sexual encounters in the film, provides a psychic and physical space in which to act out philosophical questions of what determines “humanity.” That eroticized violence ultimately must reconfigure this space as a deeply divided hierarchy suggests the agonistic and anxious nature of the male psyche. Although one of the effects of this process is certainly an overt visual and thematic misogyny, given the disparate treatment of heterosexual and homoerotic encounters, *Clockwork*’s erotics of violence cannot be maintained as a purely *heterosexual* erotics of violence. The violence spills over into the homosocial realm, ironically paralleling, mimicking, and even displacing the heterosexual erotics of violence. The anxiety produced by this lack of relief may be deflected through

the film's highly ironic lens, but it is not deflected enough to stabilize the shifting boundaries, identifications, and desires that form and deform the masculine subject.

NOTES

- 1 Some of these critics include Boyers (pp. 1–6), Daniels (pp. 44–46), Falsetto, Nelson, Samuels (pp. 439–43), Houston and Strick (pp. 62–66), and Walker (pp. 7–53).
- 2 See Daniels, Elsaesser (pp. 171–200), Moskowitz (pp. 22–24), and Kolker (pp. 78–158), and his essay in this volume.
- 3 Daniels, Falsetto, Nelson, and Walker briefly discuss gender differences in their respective analyses of *Clockwork*.
- 4 See Hanson (pp. 37–61), Hark (pp. 151–172), Moore (pp. 39–47), Pursell (pp. 218–25), Reaves (pp. 232–237), Walker (pp. 156–221), and White (pp. 120–144).
- 5 See Berger, Wallis, and Watson; Cohan and Hark; and *Screen*.
- 6 Because *Clockwork* does not establish an alternate *female* homosocial field, I designate “male homosocial” as simply “homosocial.”
- 7 The excessive whiteness of this opening tracking shot also signals the film's exclusively white racial economy. Interestingly, the only two living women shown in this first shot are African American and Hispanic: presumably whiteness, like masculinity, is the normative backdrop for an analysis of what constitutes the “human.”

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